

Angry Little Asian Girl With Lela Lee Cartoonist and
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http://discuss.washingtonpost.com/zforum/01/comic_le

"I created this comic strip, to address everything that through growing up. My parents couldn't coach me through got as a child . . . The reason I keep doing this comic because not only do I really feel strongly about the subject but with the positive feedback I have gotten, it has made me understand that I have hit on a nerve of some sort."

Submit your questions and comments to Lela Lee, creator of "Angry Little Asian Girl," before or during the discussion.

In 1994 Lela Lee first created "Angry Little Asian Girl" while viewing offensive and chauvinistic cartoons in the Spike TV's Sick and Twisted Festival of Animation. She sent a couple of short episodes to Spike and Mike's Sick and Twisted animation festival, where she was asked for exhibition rights. The shorts were reviewed by the Los Angeles Times and the LA Weekly, both giving the video sparkles. Inspired by the buzz, Lee decided to make a batch of "Angry Little Asian Girl" shirts and sold out. In 1998, Lee launched her website at www.angrylittleasiangirl.com to meet request demands.

Currently, Lee is working on getting the strip syndicated and finishing her graphic novels with each of the characters having their own book. (6 total) Lee also acts and appeared in TV shows like "Friends," "Felicity," "Scrubs," and "Rude Awakening."

Lee hopes her comic strip will help readers realize that difficult situations can have a positive outcome.

Editor's Note: Washingtonpost.com moderators retain editorial control over Live Online discussions and choose the most relevant questions for guests and hosts; guests and hosts can decline to answer questions.

Lela Lee: Hello and good morning. I (Lela Lee) am going to be here for about 15 minutes early since I'm staring at my computer monitor a lot. I have some interesting questions already queued up.

Arlington, Va.: Ms. Lee: I really admire the way you express yourself in such a constructive, thought-provoking way. I'm a cartoonist and was hoping you might talk about how you draw and color your cartoons. Though your characters are drawn, they are very expressive and unique, which totally amazes me. I'm a cartooning.

Lela Lee: I only began seriously drawing because there was a contest for "Angry Little Asian Girl 5 Angry Episodes" got such a great response. People referred to it as a comic strip, and at that point I didn't know how to draw really. I wasn't even really into comic strips. I mean I read them, but not like I do now. When I started drawing myself about comic strips, I did have natural drawing ability. I was in grade school, my teachers always said I colored very well, but who knows what that indicated. I basically went to the library a lot and read all the books they had about cartoonists and cartoonists.

EraserheadGuy, D.C.: Hi, Lela. I adooooooore Angry Little Asian Girl. Like my namesake film (hopefully an influence of yours), it is a fine commentary on this great wrong world of ours. I missed it, but is there an archive of past comics on your website?

can only find the current one.

Lela Lee: I only archive 10 weeks worth of comics. May archive more, but right now, I only keep 10 at a

Arlington, Va.: Who did you play on "Friends"

Lela Lee: I had a tiny tiny part. I was at Monica's cousin to which Monica was not invited. Monica asks me how I know and I reply "I used to work with her." And then she gets

Fairfax, Va.: You have a great site! You mentioned ALAC in response to some offensive comics you had seen. Has commented that they found your comic's characters offensive. For example, I noticed that Deborah, the "disenchanted princess" has a Jewish surname. Some might find this offensive.

Lela Lee: Thanks! I haven't had any remarks really about that. I did have one fellow who wrote in and wished that I might change the myth that everything is owned by Jewish people. But other than that's about it. I want the racial element to be something secondary to their emotions and personality. I think the emotions and moods that they have is what I relate best with, because I only really speak honestly about what has occurred to me as an American, and even with that, I can't speak for all Americans. I can only speak from my point of view and how I relate to the emotion/personality.

Silver Spring, Md.: Your film is being shown at the Free
Washington D.C. sometime in October. Will you be making
appearance and sign autographs by any chance?

washingtonpost.com: Information about Lela's film and the
Pacific American Film Festival in October can be found on the
Gallery Film Calendar website.

Lela Lee: No, unfortunately I will not be able to attend.

Mt. Rainier, Md.: I found it so sad that someone could be
so young. I saw the panel where she yells 'Stupid!'
fuzzyminded teacher who is assuming that she's a fool.
trying to see where the positive comes in here. Is this something
be our 'teachable moment' for the teacher who is probably
between shocked and scared? So much anger, how does that
in?

Lela Lee: Good point. I did that video in 1994, when I was
angry college student. I was revisiting humiliating moments
past and sort of reclaiming them thru the video—"if it's
different, I wish I would have said this." Now as I've
what you are saying and firmly agree. Also because I have
(which I never thought about when I first created the video)
have to be careful of what I say. I've changed ALAG a
lot. I want it to be a positive read.

Anchorage, Alaska: I first started reading your strip

Magagine. love it!

Do you get more compliments from readers or complaints folks?

Lela Lee: Thanks! I get both.

City of the Fallen Angels: Hi Lela,
I checked out ALAG a while ago and keep checking up
Is it just me, other chatters chime in here, but she does
particulary angry to me. She's not mad enough for the
funny enough. At times I feel like its a multicultural
circus."

Its great that you are finding success doing this, great
an audience, but let's move out of this tired
colonialist/patriarchical critique.

I'm a Chinese American woman, for what its worth

Lela Lee: ALAG started off really angry. But I grew tired
it so angry in tone all the time. I felt it wasn't a true di
character if she was just one note all the time. So I me
and also let her be angry. I know sometimes my strip's
aren't the funniest, but I try.

Virginia: Actually, I was rather offended by the character
Deborah. Why is it bad for other people to make assumptions
Asians, but OK for you to make references to "Jewish Princess"?
I am personally tired of this stereotype.

Lela Lee: I call her the "disenchanted princess." I want

"disenchanted" to be the emphasized word. She may say she's a princess, but she is actually quite unhappy with thinking that. The opposition of those words can bring to light some ironies. I'm tired of all those little girly things that say "I'm a princess." It means it's great to feel feminine and see yourself in a princess, but I'm trying to make fun of that.

Baltimore, Md.: Here is my angry Asian girl sentiment: As a first-generation born Asian, it is frustrating when white Americans question my culture, or act surprised that I can speak a language other than English. If they've never experienced growing up in a traditional Asian household, how can they make such judgments? What is the best way to communicate this in a manner that educates them without offending them?

Lela Lee: I think the best way to communicate is just to say it when it occurs. Or even after the fact. Just make sure you say it in a way that they can hear it. I think culturally as Asians we're taught to not say what we feel and to brush things under the rug. You say your frustration in a non-confrontational way to the person who you want to speak it to, I think that might be the simplest way to deal with that. People are surprisingly open to at least try to understand.

Philadelphia, Penn.: What future plans do you have for AL? I pointed me towards your website but I haven't seen in it anything about acting. Do you hope for this strip to be as wide read as Pearson? Or are you still acting your main career?

Lela Lee: I dream of "Peanuts!"

Wouldn't that be great!

I have been working on getting syndicated in papers. But it's really tough. Tougher than acting. Syndicates get about 10,000 submissions a year and can only launch about 1-2. There's the task of getting space in the comics page. Once you're in papers and has a following, it hardly ever leaves. So

I definitely want to be syndicated. I just have to be

Berkeley, Calif.: Hi.

What year did you graduate from Berkeley. And did you work at the Daily Cal?

Lela Lee: 1996.

No I never worked at the Daily Cal. Though I did read it.

Arlington, Va.: Hey Lela,

Speaking about "Friends", my APA friends and I think there should be a similar show called "Rice" with the cast being from different ethnic groups. You know, rice is a staple in the global culture.

Eleanor

Lela Lee: Good idea!

Virginia: Hi,

I was just reading some of the comics on your Web page.

the things that confused me was your discussion of the word "oriental." You said that "oriental" is offensive because it means "from far away," while "occidental" means centered. These words (both Latin derived) mean "eastern" (originally "western") (occidental). This is, in fact, still the meaning of these two words in both Spanish and Portuguese. So I don't really understand why describing someone as "eastern" or "western" is offensive, unless it is sort of unspecific.

Lela Lee: I realize I was touching on sensitive ground. History and history is always based on a perspective. I read a book called "Orientalism" by Said in college which was discussed at length by my professor. It's just a theory I learned which I think is interesting and valid in my eyes. I made it into a comment to provoke thought. But it is a theory. I think I'm going to stay away from theories since it lit off a huge discussion which I am not a historian nor am I a professor.

Washington, D.C.: Hello Lela!

Could you talk about how anger can be a positive reaction to racism and prejudice, in real life and not just in comic strips? What do you say to critics who claim that anger should be suppressed because it worsens race relations?

Lela Lee: I think when one gets angry, one can be motivated to do a lot. That is if they don't resort to violent things. Hopefully, if one is angered, they can think logically and work out a plan of action. If one is happy or just content, nothing ever gets done. Anger is not a bad thing. It can make one get so fed up that they will act against the thing that angers them.

Somewhere, USA: In response to the Asian-American from [redacted] I tend to think that most people who are rude do not mean to offend others. Frequently someone may not know that a particular subject is culturally insensitive, I usually just try to correct them and move on. Or if they are just asking rude questions, I just give a non-answer and change the subject. It usually works.

Lela Lee: Yes, I do think people are mostly kind hearted and don't mean to offend others. Your response to just correct them is a great and simple solution to unintentional rude behavior.

Arlington, Va.: Some comments and questions. First, I really dig what you're doing. I think there is merit in depicting the anger because that's real. I can think of times I wish I had gone off on someone for making a "Smart" worthy comment but didn't say anything. Second, even though on feelings and situations, people are going to be hyper about anything you do even hinting at race, and will misinterpret when their hackles raise. How much do your detractors take issue with you as opposed to just having a misguided reaction to your work just because there's racial (not ethnic) aspects?

Lela Lee: Thank you. I wish too that I was able to respond in those situations. I think both happens, I think some have a knee-jerk reaction to the strip has a colorful cast. But I do think everyone has a legitimate issue if they have an issue. I was never an issue. I did have experiences that were less than savory. I wanted the strip to go back and reclaim those things, and when I did, people took notice because they probably had similar experiences. I think most of the people who have issues are sensitive. But I do thank you for seeing that the strip has racial elements and is not racist.

Arlington, Va.: Unfortunately, it's not just Asia and Americans are uniformed and misinformed about. I'm from Ireland, and you should hear the questions I get, from Ireland and England all one big island?" to "Are you in "My great-great-great aunt Ann O'Neill came from County know her?" to "Are you an alcoholic?" These are actual Americans have asked me. I'm not making them up.

But at least no one forms an opinion about me just based on my physical appearance.

Lela Lee: That's funny! you should do stand-up with that.

Philadelphia, Penn.: How much of your everyday life goes into your comic strip?

Lela Lee: Sometimes I'll remember an incident and put it into a comic strip. Or if I am writing a comic strip and someone says something funny, I will write it down. usually I don't tell them until afterwards. THat way they will think I am doing a stand-up routine and on the spot. I like things just come out naturally.

Maryland: When I was growing up we used to tease a Chinese girl who lived in our neighborhood. We liked her but we

fun of her name because it was different and we didn't better. None of the adults ever corrected us either.

After living and traveling in Asia, now I know better but didn't give her too much baggage! So I am glad that you people to look beyond stereotypes.

Lela Lee: I think that girl wrote into the angry board la

Alexandria, Va.: I don't really have a question I just learned about your site mere days ago but I LOVE IT! I can't wait for the new show, and anything else you can think of. I think this comic strip that is so important to girls and women! I just thank you for letting girls where black when they are girls and saying "f*** you" when they want to! Keep up the good work and merchandise!

Lela Lee: Thank you!

Bethesda, Md.: Lela Lee,

Do you feel that it's more acceptable to make racial comments/assumptions about Asians than most other ethnicities in this country?

As an Asian-American, I continually find myself angered by the comments made throughout the media. I am doubly angered by the lack of outrage. I am relieved when people speak out about American and anti-Hispanic-American remarks, but outraged when people consider anti-Asian remarks no big deal.

As 4% of the population are we too small to care about
old stereotype of Asians as the "model minority" that makes
acceptable targets?

Thanks,
Disenchanted woman

Lela Lee: I think the lack of outrage is a cultural thing.
Asians. It's really up to Asians to be vocal.

Rockville, Md.: How did you like working with the cast of "Friends"?
I would assume they would be a great group of people.
but what did you think?

Lela Lee: The cast of "Friends" was very nice. I only met Courteney Cox and David Schwimmer-both were really nice. Especially David Schwimmer!

Washington D.C.: I love the comic and the characters.
that the development of the characters will create a larger audience
and if so what is your target audience?

Lela Lee: I created the other characters because I was told by the feedback "sorry, there's just no market for Asians." I also sold my comic book at comic cons and selling shirts out on the streets, that a lot of non-Asians liked the comic and got the sentiment, but felt unable to partake because it was a "racist cartoon." So I expanded it for that reason.
anyone will read my strip!

Everything isn't visual: I'm Jewish, but don't 'look' it--I've gotten surprised looks when I observe or mention Jewish traditions.

I try to be kind, and usually succeed, but many times I've
 reply, 'Looks can be deceiving--you don't look like a

Lela Lee: That's a great comeback!

I.T.B.: A recent "Angry Little Asian Girl" strip contains inaccurate information about the meanings of "oriental" and "occidental." The strip said they mean "far away" and respectively. Actually they just mean "eastern" and "western". They derive from ancient words referring to rising and setting sun). I like your strip a lot but it did grieve me to see the legend make it in like that.

Lela Lee: Yes I know. I got a lot of emails regarding the strip. It was inspired by a book I read in college and they talked at length about the theory posed by the author of the book. I realize now it is a theory and that definitions, history and culture can be very debatable. But there IS a difference between someone Asian and Oriental. The latter can be taken

Arlington, Va.: Not a question, but just an annoying occ
the elevator this morning that your strips sum up p

A guy gets on the elevator and starts speaking Japanese thinking he's just such a clever guy. Wish I spoke some language so I could show him how stupid his assumption was.

But we all look alike, don't we? Like blacks all speak the same language or jive talk.

Grrrr. Sometimes other minorities don't think about their experiences.

Lela Lee: Very true!

Alexandria, Va.: I just wanna say YOU ROCK. Keep the fun and keep me smiling! Hi-Fiver's!

Lela Lee: Hi five!

Springfield, Va.: Don't you think that due to P.C. hyper-sensitivity comedy has become more based on bodily fluids rather than that it only adds to the polarization of the country?

Lela Lee: Political correctness has made some forms of comedy a little bland. And it has made people feel like they are walking on eggshells. But I think it has been good for educating people what is acceptable nowadays. Who knows what PC does tomorrow?

Rockville, Md: Hi,

I just found out about your comic strip a couple of hours ago. I haven't read it yet. But does the theme only deal with Asian stereotypes/prejudices in general or does/will it deal with female inferiority in old Asian cultures? Just curious.

Lela Lee: Hopefully both. I'm going to introduce her panel later. It will tie in traditional Asian beliefs.

El Cerrito, Calif.: Thank you for providing an outlet for Americans to release their pent up frustrations at the situations that abound. Do you draw mostly upon your own personal experiences or do you research others' experiences? Please keep it an invaluable contribution to our free speech in America and it will make this more enlightened for my sons (2 yrs old).

Lela Lee: I intend to keep it up!

Takoma Park, Md.: You Go Girl! There's a lot of Angry Girls out here! Love the strip, am sending away for a copy.

Lela Lee: Great! Thank you!

Here's the last para that got truncated:

Lela Lee: Thank you for your questions! I am grateful to have had this outlet so my intentions could be better understood. I hope the strip has touched many nerves in irritating ways and in good ways. What I aim for is a dialogue and for these situations to be brushed under the rug. Mostly, the strip has racial elements and a cast of colorful characters, and for that reason, a dialogue.

begun. I grew up with no reflections/images of myself and from my parents with regard to misunderstandings and college I made a short video to revisit those events. That set off a buzz. People called it a comic strip which at I hadn't done. So I made it into a comic strip because I many people wanted to hear more. Hopefully, with time syndicated in newspapers and the fact that they are such an issue. The comic strip can be about girls who have colorful and the lives they lead. Thank you very much!

lunch now. (It's 12:40 pm here in CA)